This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

600084984+

Dr. *Chauncy's*

LECTURE

SERMON,

From ACTS 4. 32.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

Chriſtian Love, as exemplified by the firſt chriſtian church in their HAVING ALL THINGS IN COMMON, *placed in its true and juſt point of light.*

IN A

SERMON,

Preached at the Thurſday-Lecture, in BOSTON, Auguſt 3d. 1773.

FROM ACTS 4. 32.

WHEREIN it is ſhown, that chriſtian churches, in their character as ſuch, are ſtrongly obliged to evidence the reality of their chriſtian love, though not by *having all things in common*, yet by making ſuch proviſion, according to their ability, for their members in a ſtate of penury, as that none of them may ſuffer through want of the things needful for the body; and that DEACONS are officers appointed by Chriſt to take care of his poor ſaints, making all proper diſtributions to them in his name, and as enabled hereto by the churches to which they reſpectively belong.

BY CHARLES CHAUNCY, D. D.

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN BOSTON.

BOSTON: Printed by KNEELAND & DAVIS, in Queen-Street, for THOMAS LEVERETT, in Cornhill.

M,DCC,LXXIII.

100. g. 72.

Advertiſement.

THE following ſermon is printed at the deſire of ſome that heard it preached; thinking it might happily tend to revive in *our churches that ſpirit of love towards the poor in communion with them*, which was the diſtinguiſhing characteriſtic of *chriſtian churches* in the firſt age of the goſpel. They alſo hoped, that a publication of this nature might lead DEACONS into clear and juſt ſentiments of the *nature* and *importance* of their office, and churches into as juſt ones reſpecting their obligations to fill their hands for diſtributions to Chriſt's poor, as they are able, and there may be calls for it in the governing providence of God.

THEY, accordingly, recommend it to the ſerious peruſal, eſpecially, of *Deacons*, and the *Churches* to which they are related; humbly leaving it with the "God of love" to give it deſired Succeſs.

Having all things in Common, explained and improved.

ACTS 4. 32.

"*And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and of one ſoul: neither ſaid any of them, that ought of the things which he poſſeſſed were his own; but they had all things in common.*"

THERE is no need, in order to introduce a diſcourſe on theſe words, to take into previous conſideration either the preceeding, or following context. They are an independent ſentence, containing an account of the temper and conduct of the chriſtian church at Jeruſalem, in the beginning of the apoſtolic times. Says the inſpired writer, they "were of one heart, and of one ſoul, and had all things in common".

WHAT I propoſe is, to dilate upon theſe words, that we may be let in a clear and juſt underſtanding of them; and, as I go along, to make the proper reflections

reflections upon what may be exhibited as their real truth.

THEY begin, "and the multitude of them that believed".—The perſons here ſpoken of were "believers"; that is, converts to the chriſtian faith. And they were converts from *Judaiſm*. For the goſpel had not as yet been preached to the Gentile nations. The apoſtles, it is true, had, before this time, been commiſſioned by their Lord "to preach, in his name, repentance, and remiſſion of ſins, among ALL NATIONS," as we read in Luk. 24. 47: But they were expreſsly ordered, in the words that immediately follow, to begin their miniſtry, in execution of their commiſſion, "at *Jeruſalem*; and to tarry there until they had been endued with power from on high"; that is, with miraculous power from the Holy Ghoſt.

WHY our Lord confined the labours of his apoſtles, for a while, within ſo narrow a compaſs as the city of Jeruſalem, after he had commiſſioned them to preach the goſpel to all the world, may be difficult to ſay. But could nothing elſe be ſaid, it would be abundantly ſufficient, at leaſt to us who call ourſelves chriſtians, to ſay, "So it ſeemed good in his ſight".

I MAY, with propriety, add here, it was an honor, a ſignal honor, to the city of Jeruſalem, and to the Jewiſh nation in common, that the firſt chriſtian church ſhould conſiſt of *Jews*, and be gathered at *Jeruſalem*. And, at the ſame time, it illuſtrates that interrogatory appeal of the apoſtle Paul, in the firſt ver. of the 11th chapter of his epiſtle to the Romans, "hath God caſt away his people"?

people"? Upon which he adds, "God forbid"! As if he had ſaid, God hath not *wholly* "caſt away his people". No; a number of them were believers in Chriſt, the promiſed Meſſiah, and ſo conſiderable a number, that they might be called "a multitude". So ſpeaks the text.

"THE *multitude* of them that believed". And it is with great propriety that they are thus denominated. "About an hundred and twenty" only, it is true, was the number at firſt, as we read in the 1ſt chapter of the Acts; but, after the deſcent of the holy Ghoſt upon the apoſtles, in miraculous gifts, they were greatly increaſed. "Three thouſand were added to them", in conſequence of one ſermon, preached by the apoſtle Peter, the record of which we have in the 2d chapter of Acts. In the chapter in which is my text, ver. 4, their number is ſaid to be "about five thouſand". And in the next chapter, v. 14, we read, that "believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women". This increaſe of believers was at Jeruſalem, and of thoſe who were converted from Judaiſm.

I MAY properly take occaſion here to reflect with grief upon the ſtate of the church of Chriſt at preſent, with reſpect to the additions that are made to it of thoſe that "believe," ſo believe as that they "ſhall be ſaved". It cannot be now ſaid, as in my text, "the multitude of them that believed". Bleſſed be God, there is yet a church of Chriſt, and there are in it believers in truth, believers unto life; and this, whether we conſider the church in general, or as conſtituted of particular individual churches

churches. But the increaſe of converts is not now as it was when the apoſtles went forth in the power of the Spirit of Jeſus Chriſt. There is at this day, and has been for a long time, yea for ages, an awful withdraw of that ſucceſs, which, in the apoſtolic days, attended the preaching of the croſs of Chriſt. Notwithſtanding the revivals of the ſpirit of chriſtianity at particular times, and in ſome particular places, the cauſe, in general, has been long languiſhing, and is, at preſent, in a ſad, decaying, and almoſt dead condition.

It certainly is ſo in this Town and Land.—How ſmall is the number of thoſe, who give themſelves up to God in Jeſus Chriſt, to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, with a becoming care of being blameleſs? We are viſibly under great decays as to the life of religion. With what little ſucceſs are the means of grace accompanied? What an awful unconcernedneſs does there appear in all ſorts of perſons about their ſouls, and the concerns of another world? How great is the luke-warmneſs and indifference, even of chriſtian profeſſors? How general their ſpiritual ſloth and negligence? And how many, what vaſt multitudes among us, are ſecure in their ſins, unmindful of God, thoughtleſs of Chriſt, allowing themſelves to "walk in the way of their own heart, and in the ſight of their eyes"? Let us not be inſenſible of the lamentably bad ſtate of religion among us. Let us be humble herefor, and ſeek to God to "pour out his ſpirit" upon us, to "revive the things that remain, and are ready to die" We cannot unite in a more ſeaſonable, pertinent prayer to the God

God of all grace than that, "Turn thou us again, O Lord God of hoſts, cauſe thy face to ſhine, and we ſhall be ſaved".

THE text goes on, "they were of one heart, and of one ſoul". This may reſpect their unity in *ſentiment* as well as *affection*. Such was their faith and ſuch their love, that it might be ſaid, they, had, as it were, "one ſoul". There were no diſputings among them, no ſtrife, no animoſity. And, inſtead of hatred, they were filled with good will towards each other, ſhewing its reality in all the genuine exerciſes of chriſtian kindneſs. They were in judgment, and affection, the ſame as if they had been animated with one common ſpirit.

THEY were one in *ſentiment*, that is, with reſpect to the divine miſſion of Jeſus Chriſt, his being the Meſſiah, and the only Saviour of men. This was the grand truth the apoſtles inſiſted on in their preaching, particularly in my context; and this, accordingly, was the great object of the faith of this "multitude". They embraced it as a ſure truth, that Jeſus who "had been crucified, and was raiſed from the dead", was "the Son of God"; and they were as "one" in this faith.

HAPPY this firſt chriſtian church, ſo united in that faith which is the grand foundation of the religion of Jeſus Chriſt! Happy, that they ſhould, as "one" build, as the language of my context is, upon "the ſtone ſet at nought" by ſo many of the jewiſh builders, and that God had made the head of the corner; in whom there "is ſalvation, and in no other".

THIS is the great band of chriſtian union, that "unity in faith", which is recommended in the new-teſtament writings, and which was exemplified by the firſt chriſtians.

It were to be wiſhed, thoſe who profeſs themſelves chriſtians, would preſerve this unity in the bond of peace. Then would they ceaſe from forming themſelves into ſeparate communities, on account of thoſe differences in opinion which enter not into the eſſence of chriſtianity, but are rather points of doubtful diſputation. Then would the church of Chriſt be no longer a collection of contending ſects, and party combinations, but "one body", cemented together, and united, not in the ſame ſentiments about tything mint, annice, and cumming, or any other matters of comparatively ſmall importance; but in that faith without which no man can be a chriſtian, a chriſtian in ſuch a ſenſe as that he may have good hope of entering into life eternal. This is the unity in ſentiment, the oneneſs in faith, that is worthy to be deſired, prayed for, and ſought after, by all that are the friends of Chriſt, and the intereſt of his religion.

THIS multitude of primitive believers, were not only "one" in ſentiment, but "one" in *affection* alſo. With reſpect to love, it might be ſaid of them, they had, as it were, but "one heart, and one ſoul". They loved one another as they loved themſelves; "yea, as Chriſt loved them". Their love was without diſſimulation. It was not a pretence only, a meer empty verbal compliment; but a noble reality, appearing to be ſo by its operation in all the fruits of true chriſtian benevolence. They "walked in love, even as Chriſt Jeſus alſo walked".

They

They "abounded in love", both as an inward affection, and in all thoſe outward acts that are the proper diſcoveries of ſuch an affection. And it was eminently in this way that theſe firſt believers, and others alſo in after days, drew the attention, and excited the admiration, even of thoſe who were unbelievers: for they have been heard to ſay, as their words are recorded by one and another of the ancient writers, "Behold, how the chriſtians love one another! How chearfully, how liberally, they do good to one another"!

An example this, highly worthy of the imitation of all who would be owned, another day, as the followers of thoſe who inherited that ſpirit, which was the peculiar glory of our common Maſter and Saviour. The law of love is eminently the law of Jeſus Chriſt; and we are obliged as chriſtians to nothing, if we are not under ſolemn bonds to love one another. Love, in the firſt times of the goſpel, was wrought into the very frame of the ſouls of believers; and this they evidenced by their readineſs to all the offices of chriſtian kindneſs towards each other.—How different are moſt chriſtians now from what they were then! Can it be ſaid, even of thoſe of the ſame communion, that they are as "one" in affection? May we not rather take to our ſelves words, and lament the flight of that ſpirit of love, which was once the diſtinguiſhing mark of thoſe who were believers in Chriſt!

It is further added in my text, "neither ſaid any of them that ought of the things which he poſſeſſed was his own; but they had all things in common". The things here ſaid to be "had in common" muſt not be underſtood as extending to

a community in every thing. Such an explanation of the words would be an abſurdity in reaſon, and a direct contradiction to the precepts of revelation. They ought therefore to be limited to ſuch things only as might, in conſiſtency with the rule of duty, be poſſeſſed and enjoyed in common. The inſpired writer of my text has accordingly taken care to ſpecify particularly "the things they had in common". Says he, in the following 34th and 35th verſes, "as many as were poſſeſſed of lands, or houſes, ſold them, and brought the prices of the things that were ſold, and laid them down at the apoſtles feet; and diſtribution was made to every man according as he had need". To the like purpoſe, having ſaid, in the 2d chapter of this ſame book of the Acts, ver. 44, "all that believed had all things in common", he goes on, in the next ver. to give us a diſtinct and full account of "the thing" he had ſaid "believers had in common". His words are, "and ſold their poſſeſſions and goods; and parted them to all men, as every man had need". It was therefore the worldly eſtate, the poſſeſſed houſes and lands, of theſe believers, turned into money, that they all had the benefit of in common. There is nothing ſaid, from whence it can be collected, that theſe believers enjoyed, or countenanced the enjoyment of any thing in common, that would infer a violation of the bonds thoſe are under, who, as the ſcripture ſpeaks, are no longer "twain, but myſtically one in the Lord". Some may have interpreted this example of theſe firſt chriſtians in ſuch a latitude. But it may, without the leaſt heſitation, be ſaid, it was never ſo interpreted, unleſs

by

by thoſe, whoſe eyes were blinded bythe riſe of impure miſts from a groſly carnalized heart.

THE only queſtion of any importance here is, were chriſtians, from the beginning, and all along to this day, obliged, in virtue of this example of the believers at Jeruſalem, to ſell their poſſeſſions, and put all in one ſtock for the common benefit of all? Some have imagined, that an affirmative anſwer to this queſtion is the true one; but upon inſufficient reaſon. And this I ſhall endeavour, in as conciſe a manner as I can, to make evident to you. In order whereto let it be obſerved,

THESE believers, conſtituting the church at Jeruſalem, were not obliged, in conſequence of any apoſtolic command, to make ſale of their poſſeſſions, that they might have all things in common. We have no account of ſuch a command. And ſhould any affirm there was one, they would only declare their own imagination, not what is any where wrote in the inſpired books. Nay, inſtead of being divinely taught, that theſe believers were commanded to ſell their eſtates, that they might all live in common upon one ſtock, we are obviouſly led to think, that they were every one left at liberty to do in this matter as they judged to be right and fit. To this purpoſe are thoſe words of the apoſtle Peter, in the chapter following my text, ver. 4, which he ſpake to Ananias with a direct reference to the ſale he had made of his poſſeſſion; "while it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was ſold, was it not in thy own power"? Surely, he would not have ſaid this, he could not have ſaid it with propriety, or truth, if Ananias had been under the obligation of a command from Chriſt,

conveyed

conveyed by his apoſtles, to part with his poſſeſſion, and put the price into the common ſtock. Upon this ſuppoſition, how could his poſſeſſion be ſo called "his own" as that he might not have ſold it? and when he had ſold it, how could the price of it be ſaid to have been "in his own power"? It ſhould ſeem demonſtrable, from this application of the apoſtle Peter to Ananias, that the ſale which theſe believers at Jeruſalem made of their poſſeſſions, was a matter of their own free choice, not what they were abſolutely bound to do in virtue of any requirement of Jeſus Chriſt.

AND we may the rather be ſatisfied of this, as we no where read, in the new-teſtament, of any chriſtian church, who "had all things in common", conformable to the example of the church at Jeruſalem. And what is more, we no where, in the inſpired books, find a *command*, directed to any chriſtian church, or to any member belonging to it, obliging them to ſell their poſſeſſions, that the whole community might be ſupported out of one common ſtock; which cannot be accounted for, had it been the will of Chriſt, that no one of his diſciples ſhould poſſeſs, as his own property, either houſe or land; but that every one, who profeſſed faith in him, ſhould, without the exception of a ſingle perſon, ſell his eſtate for the advantage of all in common.

IT may be further worthy of notice, the new-teſtament-writers are ſo far from reducing all chriſtians to a level, by putting them upon having all things in common, that they obviouſly ſuppoſe there actually was, and would be, a difference between them in point of outward circumſtances. Hence they often ſpeak of the members of this, and the other chriſtian church

church under the characters of *rich* and *poor*; which would have been altogether improper, if chriſtianity had deſtroyed this diſtinction, by obliging all that were believers to have all things in common. And not only do the apoſtolic writers ſpeak of *rich* and *poor* in the chriſtian church, but graft many of their inſtructions upon this difference there was in the worldly circumſtances of its members. The *rich*, particularly, are applied to as ſuch, and minded of the duty they are obliged to in this capacity. Says the apoſtle Paul, directing Timothy how to manage in his office as a goſpel-miniſter, 1 Tim. 6. 17, "charge them that are *rich* in this world that they truſt not in certain riches, but in the living God—that they do good, and be rich in good works". Where would be the pertinency of this charge to Timothy, if the ſuppoſition of rich men in the church of Chriſt was a contradiction to the goſpel eſtabliſhment? In this caſe, the direction to him muſt have been, ſay to ſuch as are rich, ſell your poſſeſſions, and ceaſe being rich. But not a word to this purpoſe do we meet with here, or in any paſſage of ſcripture, in what is ſaid to them that were rich.

It is ſtill further obſervable, the apoſtle Paul, in writing to the Corinthian church, as "touching the miniſtring to the ſaints", gives them this inſtruction, 2. Cor. 9 7. "Every man according as he purpoſeth in his heart, ſo let him give; not grudgingly, or of neceſſity; for God loveth a chearful giver". Is this an injunction that will, in the leaſt, comport with the ſuppoſition, that the individuals of this church had nothing of their own, but had all things in common? Every man, you ſee, is left

to

to give according to the free purpoſe of his own heart: Only he is inſtructed to give with chearfulneſs, and liberality; and upon the encouragement mentioned in the foregoing verſe, "This I ſay, he that ſoweth ſparingly, ſhall reap ſparingly; and he that ſoweth bountifully ſhall reap bountifully". But there would be no room for ſowing ſparingly, or bountifully, if no member of this church had any thing he could call his own, but whatever he poſſeſſed, more or leſs, muſt be thrown into one common ſtock for the benefit of all. Had this been the truth of fact, or an apoſtolic eſtabliſhment, the direction, in this paſſage of ſcripture, is altogether unintelligible.

You will, perhaps, aſk, if the practice of this firſt chriſtian church at Jeruſalem, in ſelling their poſſeſſions, and having all things in common, was not intended as an example obligatory on all other chriſtian ſocieties, why was it recorded? And why ſo recorded as to lead us into an opinion of their conduct as truly noble and benevolent?

The anſwer is at once obvious, and I hope ſatisfactory. It is as follows. This firſt church, at the time when they came into this practice, were peculiarly ſituated. Perhaps, no church, from that day to this, has been in like circumſtances. For it is to be obſerved, though, from the evidence that had been held out to their view, they admitted it into their hearts as a truth, that Jeſus was the Son of God, and Saviour of the world, that he died, roſe again, aſcended up to heaven, and will come in the end of time to confer eternal life upon all his faithful followers; and though, in the eſteem of the apoſtles, they were qualified, in conſequence of this faith,

faith, and a profeſſion of it, for baptiſm, and fellowſhip with believers in all acts of chriſtian communion; yet it cannot be ſuppoſed, but that, in this beginning of their faith, they ſhould be imperfectly inſtructed in the nature, doctrines, and precepts of the goſpel kingdom. Further teaching; yea, a ſeries of it was yet needful. They needed particularly to be guarded againſt the prejudices, errors, and corruptions of their former unconverted ſtate, and to be more fully indoctrinated in the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and Jeſus Chriſt. And this, until a more regular ſtate of things could be accompliſhed, it is at once evident, would take time, and bear hard upon thoſe who had nothing to depend upon for a ſubſiſtence but the labor of their hands. Now, in ſuch a ſituation of things, what more nobly benevolent than this conduct of the firſt believers, in having all things in common? Eſpecially, if it be remembered, as it ought to be, that this church was conſtituted chiefly of Jews that were not inhabitants at Jeruſalem, but occaſional comers there from a great variety of diſtant places. Hence we read, in the forecited 2d of the Acts, that, among the three thouſand Jews, who were added to the church, at this time, there were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, dwellers in Meſopotamia, Judea, Pontus, Aſia, and other places. And being thus occaſionally at Jeruſalem on the day of Pentecoſt, when the holy Ghoſt made his deſcent on the apoſtles, they were eye-witneſſes of its marvellous effects, and had the opportunity of hearing the ſermon then preached by the apoſtle Peter, under the inſpiration of the Spirit; upon which they were ſtruck with

 conviction

conviction, profeſſed faith in Chriſt, and were admitted, to fellowſhip, as diſciples, in all acts of chriſtian communion. But being at a great diſtance from their proper homes, they were incapable of providing for their own ſupport, ſhould they continue at Jeruſalem; and yet, it cannot be ſuppoſed but that, upon their becoming converts to the faith of Chriſt, they ſhould be deſirous of tarrying here, as it was highly proper, if not abſolutely neceſſary, they ſhould, that they might be more fully inſtructed in the way of ſalvation through Jeſus who was crucified. Beſides, they might, by direction from the Holy Ghoſt, be influenced to continue here, that, being under the tuition of the apoſtles, and enjoying the advantage of chriſtian communion in goſpel ordinances, they might be formed for preachers to carry the glad tidings of ſalvation to the ſeveral nations from whence they came, and in this way be inſtrumental in propogating the religion of Jeſus. In this ſituation of things, wherein could the believers at Jeruſalem have more nobly manifeſted the warmth of their love to Chriſt, and the greatneſs of their affection for each other, than by ſaying, as in my text, that "nought of the things which they poſſeſſed were their own, but that all things ſhould be had in common"? In like circumſtances, the like conduct would be generous and noble, and would be the conduct of chriſtians, if actuated by that benevolent principle, which reigned in theſe firſt believers, making them all of "one heart, and of one ſoul". But for any to plead, that this practice of thoſe primitive chriſtians ſhould form a law, an eſtabliſhed rule,

rule, obligatory upon all chriſtians, in all ages, however differently circumſtanced, would be highly abſurd, and greatly hurtful in its tendency and operation.

NEVERTHELESS, this example of their unfeignedly generous love is very inſtructive to chriſtians, conſidered both *individually*, and as united in *particular ſocieties*. It is in this latter view of chriſtians, only I ſhall conſider the example in my text, as eminently inſtructive.

AND the inſtruction they are taught from it is, to take all due care, that ſuch among them as are in neceſſitous circumſtances, may be ſo far provided for, as to be preſerved from ſuffering through want. Though no particular ſocieties of chriſtians are obliged, after the pattern of the church at Jeruſalem, to ſell what they poſſeſs, aud throw all into one ſtock for the common ſupport; yet they are, without all doubt, bound by their example to do their utmoſt, that none of their brethren in Chriſt, eſpecially of the ſame community with themſelves, may be ſuffered to drag on life unrelieved under the ſtraits, diſtreſſes, and miſeries of unavoidable poverty. And the obligation, from this example, is the more binding, as it co-incides with the known practice of all chriſtian churches in apoſtolic times. * It was their conſtant care to provide, by their charitable diſtributions, for the relief of their brethren in Chriſt under diſtreſſing circumſtances, whether through poverty, or the unjuſt treatment of a wicked and unbelieving world. And they did this under apoſtolic guidance; yea, by expreſs order from theſe

* Vid. Rom. 15, 25, 26. 1 Cor. 16, 1, 2. 2 Cor, 8, 1, 2, 3. Heb. 6, 10.

theſe inſpired teachers of the will of Chriſt. The practice of theſe primitive churches, thus circumſtanced, is therefore obligatory upon all after churches; and while they copy after it, they may be aſſured, they will fall in with the mind of Chriſt, as their practice was founded on apoſtolic direction, which was infallibly right; becauſe they were under the immediate guidance of the Spirit of truth.

The churches of Chriſt, it is acknowledged, were differently ſituated in that day from what they are in this. They were then the objects of the hatred and contempt of the civil magiſtrate, not of his paternal care and protection: Whereas the civil powers, in many places at leaſt, are now on the ſide of chriſtian communities, and profeſs a regard for them, and readineſs to afford them their help.

This difference between the ſtate of chriſtians now, and in the times of the apoſtles, it muſt be owned, is a very great one in favor of chriſtian churches at this day. But what is the natural, obvious deduction herefrom? Surely, it will not follow, that chriſtian churches, becauſe they are under a chriſtian civil magiſtracy, are diſcharged from their obligations to chriſtian charity. As our Savior has ſaid, Mat. 26. 11, "The poor ye have always with you", that is, to furniſh occaſions for the exerciſe of charity, and to call to it. The neceſſities of thoſe, who are of "the houſhold of faith", may not at all times, and in all places, ſo loudly call for equally large diſtributions in order to their relief: But in all ages, and in all the churches of the ſaints, there will be a number, more or leſs, of helpleſs orphans,

orphans, widows, and poor people, who muſt be provided for, or ſubjected to all the miſeries of a deſtitute condition in life.

BESIDES what has been offered, it may be worthy of ſpecial notice, the apoſtles of our Lord, under the extraordinary guidance of the Holy Ghoſt, appointed officers in the chriſtian churches they founded, whoſe ſpecial buſineſs it was to take care of the charity of the churches they were reſpectively related to, and to make diſtribution of it according to the various wants of their ſeveral members. Theſe officers are called, in the apoſtolic writings, DEACONS, and they have been diſtinguiſhed by this name from that day to this.

The firſt deacons were conſtituted at Jeruſalem, and the work aſſigned them was in part *extraordinary*, being adjuſted to the *extraordinary circumſtances* of the church there. This church, at this time, had one common ſtock, out of which they were all ſupplied. Deacons were accordingly appointed to "ſerve tables" † or, in other words, to make uſe of the churches money, which was depoſited in their hands, not only in providing for the *Lord's table*, but ſuch *other tables* as were neceſſary for the common ſupport. : A work that required great wiſdom, impartiality, candor, as well as labor, in order to a right and commendable diſcharge of it.

That which was *extraordinary* in the work of theſe deacons, the ſupport of all out of one common ſtock, ſoon ceaſed; but taking care of the helpleſs poor members of Chriſt ſtill continued the duty of every church, and will continue to be their duty to the end of the world. And, upon this foundation

† See the account at large in the 6th Chapter of the Acts.

foundation, the deacon's office became a *perpetual* one in the church. All the churches, in apoſtolic times, that were ſet in order, were furniſhed with *Deacons*, as well as Paſtors. Hence the apoſtle Paul inſcribes his epiſtle to the Philippians in that ſtile, "to all the ſaints in Chriſt Jeſus, with the Biſhops, or Paſtors, and *Deacons*". And in his firſt epiſtle to Timothy, which was intended for the direction of all churches, in all ages, he particularly ſpecifies the qualifications of thoſe who are fit to be *Deacons*, and gives direction that ſuch only ſhould be put into office.

IT is from hence evident, that the Deacon's office is a *perpetual* one, and that all the churches of Chriſt, in ſucceſſion thro' all ages, ſhould be furniſhed with them. And why? Principally, and above all, that, as truſtees of the churches, and as officers of Jeſus Chriſt, they might employ themſelves in miniſtring to the poor ſaints. But how ſhould they do this, unleſs they be enabled to it? And how ſhould they be enabled, but from the charitable diſtributions of the churches whoſe officers they reſpectively are, under Chriſt, the great head over all? The appointment of Deacons to take care, that the poor ſaints be relieved and helped, is, in true conſtruction, a ſolemn law of Chriſt, obliging the churches who chuſe them to put it in their power, as God ſhall give ability, to anſwer this charitable intention of their office. Surely, this office in the church would not have been conſtituted, if it had been a needleſs, uſeleſs one! And uſeleſs, as to the main end of its inſtitution, it muſt certainly be, if the churches are not bound, by the authority of Chriſt,

Chriſt, to a due care to fill their hands for diſtribution to charitable and pious purpoſes. *

In ſhort, either the Deacon's office is an ordinance of Jeſus Chriſt, or it is not. If it is not, why do our churches, in ſolemn form, chuſe men out of their number to take upon them this office? They muſt be ſuppoſed to eſteem *Deacons*, officers of divine appointment, or they prophanely mock God when they elect them as ſuch. If they are officers

* My late worthy colleague, the Rev. Mr. Foxcroft, in his ſermon preached at the ordination of a Deacon, though dead yet ſpeaks to you, in the following very pertinent words. "This officer (meaning the Deacon) ſtands in the houſe of "God a conſtant monitor to the aſſembly, of their duty to "honour the Lord with their ſubſtance. And the church, "that elect him, do hereby practically contract with him, "that they will own him in the execution of his office, "find him ſuitable employment in his ſtation, and ſupply him, "as they are able, for a liberal diſtribution to the neceſſities "of ſaints. I cannot but look on it a groſs incongruity, "not to ſay a trifling formality, and mockery of a divine "inſtitution, to put men, by a ſolemn church-vote, in the "name of God, under the character of *Deacons*, and yet "not appoint them over their proper buſineſs", nor take "the neceſſary methods to furniſh them for "uſing their "office well".—He adds a little onwards "If the church "did their duty "concerning the collection for the ſaints, "every one contributing as God hath proſpered them", there "would be a ſufficiency of work for the officers Chriſt has "inſtituted to "ſerve tables." None, methinks, could then, "with any colour of reaſon, ſcruple the propriety of a ſo-"lemn ordination of them. And as for them, how would it "encourage their hearts, to ſee the churches, they reſpectively "ſerve, taking a proper care, that they may be "thoroughly "furniſhed unto all good works" for the houſe of their God, "and the offices thereof! How gladly would they receive "the gift, and take upon them the fellowſhip of miniſtring "unto the ſaints"!—Thus he.

officers of Chriſt's appointment, the churches who chuſe them are moſt certainly obliged to acknowledge them in this character, by enabling them, as they have ability, to afford all needed help to "the ſaints that are in Chriſt Jeſus". This is the great end of their appointment; this is the buſineſs in ſpecial they are ſet over: And for churches to elect them to manage this buſineſs, and carry into execution this great and good end of their office, and, at the ſame time, to take little or no care to furniſh them with ability herefor, is an inconſiſtency in conduct that cannot eaſily be acccounted for. And yet, this inconſiſtency moſt of our churches are juſtly chargeable with.

It is I ſuppoſe, the truth, in regard of all our churches, that they have *Deacons*, and of their own election; and this, when ſolemnly met together in the name of the Lord. And is it not as real a truth, with reſpect to the moſt of them, that their *Deacons* ſuſtain rather the *name* of their office, than the thing itſelf; having little or nothing to do that is proper to the principal end of their inſtitution by Chriſt? May it not be juſtly ſaid, that too generally, throughout the land, their main buſineſs is to provide for, and ſerve at, the ſacramental table? As for Chriſt's poor, they are no more enabled, by the churches they are related to, to make diſtributions for their relief, than if they ſuſtained no office in the church of God. Is this as it ought to be? May it not rather be ſaid, that ſuch churches are groſly wanting in thoſe diſcoveries of chriſtian affection, which were ſo conſpicuous in the church at Jeruſalam, and all the other churches we read of in the new-teſtament-books.

It

It will, perhaps, be pleaded here, our civil rulers have empowered the ſeveral Towns, within their juriſdiction, to raiſe ſuch moneys as may be judged neceſſary for the ſupport of the poor, and to appoint perſons to take care, that theſe moneys be diſpoſed of, ſo as to anſwer the good end for which they are raiſed; in conſideration whereof, the churches are excuſed from thoſe charities, which would enable their *Deacons* to do that which is done in other ways.

The anſwer is at once obvious. The laws impowering our ſeveral towns to provide for the ſupport of the poor, reſpect the *poor in common*, of whatever denomination, be their character as it may; not diſtinguiſhing any on account of their *membership in the church of Chriſt*: Whereas, it is the requirement of the goſpel of the bleſſed God, that chriſtian churches particularly regard the *poor ſaints*; taking all due care, that thoſe, who are members of the ſame myſtical body with themſelves, ſhould be ſo far helped as not to live in ſuffering circumſtances, through want of the things that are needful for the body. And, if any of their members are in real neceſſity, their charitable aſſiſtance is what they are as certainly obliged to, as chriſtians were in the firſt, or any other, period of the chriſtian church. Their living in a chriſtian country, where proviſion is made by law for the relief of poor people in *general*, may make a difference as to the quantum of the charity, that may be proper and ſutable; but it makes none at all as to the thing itſelf, where there is real need of it. And, indeed, if the proviſion that is made by the law in any place for the ſupport of the poor, *in common*, can-

cels the obligations of the churches to make proviſion for *thoſe of their own body*, who are in neceſſitous circumſtances, it totally ſets aſide the *Deacon's office*, though an apoſtolic appointment in the name of Jeſus Chriſt. What need of *Deacons* in the church of God, if Chriſt's poor are not to be the ſpecial objects of their care? Why ſhould the churches chuſe them into office, if they are excuſed from putting any thing into their hands for a diſtribution for the relief of the *ſaints*? The plain truth is, no civil conſtitution can vacate an inſtitution of Jeſus Chriſt. And as *Deacons* are officers of his appointment, and choſen by the churches as ſuch, they are ſolemnly bound, and by their own choice too, in compliance with what they profeſſedly eſteem the will of Chriſt, to own them in the buſineſs they are called to, and ſet over, namely, that of miniſtring to the wants of thoſe, *in ſpecial*, who are of "the houſhold of faith". And that they may be properly ſupplied, as officers in the kingdom of Chriſt, and in his name, for the execution of the benevolent truſt repoſed in them, it is, without all doubt, the incumbant duty of the churches of which they are reſpectively Deacons, to endeavour, as they have ability, to put it in their power to relieve their poor members, as there may be occaſion for, and calls to it, in the alwiſe, righteous government of providence.

Some of our churches, thanks be to God, have ſomething of a ſtock, or fund, owing to the pious and charitable legacies of thoſe, who were concerned that the *poor diſciples of Chriſt* might, in *his name*, and by *his officers* in the church, be taken care

care of. But it will not be pretended, that any fund, in any of our churches, will afford that which is ſufficient for the relief of all belonging to them, that are needy and deſtitute: And what is lacking, this way, ought to be made up in ſome other; or even theſe churches will fall greatly ſhort of their duty, and leave their Deacons unable to anſwer, in a commendable meaſure, the good intention of their office.

WHAT ſome individuals in our churches have done, or may ſtill do, in charities to the poor in general, or the poor of thoſe chriſtian communities of which they themſelves are a part, is known to God, and their own conſciences. But may it not be juſtly queſtioned, whether any of our churches, AS SUCH, have taken that care to enable their Deacons, as Chriſt's officers, and in his behalf, to make thoſe communications to his needy diſciples, as they had ability to do, and ought to have done? Had the conſtituent members of our ſeveral churches been as ready to communicate, that their brethren in Chriſt, conflicting with the miſeries of poverty, might be relieved and helped, as they have been to expend their money for that which profiteth not, would ſo many of them have ſo often been pinched with hunger, and cold, and ſuffered to groan under diſtreſs, through want, I do not ſay of the conveniences and comforts, but of even the neceſſaries of life? Should I not ſpeak the truth, if I ſhould affirm, that no viſible ſaint, no member in any of our churches, would ſuffer for want of what is needful for the body, if we ſpared for their relief a ſmall part only of that which is laid out for rich

furniture

furniture for our houſes, in coſtly apparel to deck our bodies, and in luxurious variety to cover our tables? Should each one that is a member of the church of Chriſt lay his hand upon his heart, and declare the genuine dictates of conſcience, would he not be obliged to own, that he had needleſsly, might I not ſay ſinfully, ſpent that, which, if he had laid up in ſtore for the purpoſes of charity and piety, would have made the hearts of many to ſing for joy, who have been oppreſſed, and over-burdened with the weight of difficulties and ſtraits, ariſing from the poverty of their condition? Our churches, my brethren, have loſt, in a great meaſure, the ſpirit of the primitive churches of Chriſt; their ſpirit of love, operating in all the offices of charitable goodneſs, which diſtinguiſhed them from other men, and were as a mark, or badge, by which they were known to be believers in him whom God has ſent to be the Savior of the world. We are too generally become lovers of ourſelves, lovers of the gaities, the vanities, the amuſements, and faſhionable follies of the degenerate age we live in. The very beſt of us are too much conformed to this preſent evil world, and ſuffer it ſo to engroſs our affection, as that we have but little, very little, left to ſhew it ſelf in chriſtian acts of kindneſs and beneficence to the ſaints that are in Chriſt Jeſus.

It were to be wiſhed our churches were now, as they were in the apoſtles days, "one in heart and affection", churches towards each other, and every church towards every member belonging to it. And that we may be "provoked" to this union in love, evidencing its reality in works of kindneſs and

and charity, as their may be occaſion, I ſhall briefly propoſe to your conſideration the following things, with the mentioning of which I ſhall conclude the preſent diſcourſe.

THE firſt thing worthy of ſpecial notice is, that the faith which conſtitutes men chriſtians in truth, and love to their fellow-brethren in Chriſt, not the pretence of love, but its reality, are ſo far connected together in the ſacred books, as to lead us moſt obviouſly into the thought, that they are, and ought always to be, inſeperable concomitants. Turn to what Paul ſays to the church in Epheſus, 1ſt chap. 15 ver. To the like purpoſe he writes to the church at Coloſſ, 1ſt chap. 4th ver. The ſame connection of love we find, in his 1ſt Epiſ. to the Theſſalonians 1ſt chap. 3 ver. So in his 2d epiſt. 1 chap. 3d ver. I might refer you to a great number of other texts, in which faith in Chriſt, and love to the brethren, the ſaints, the houſhold of faith, are linked together, as though they could not be disjoined, but would ever accompany each other. And, in truth, it is of the very eſſence of faith, that faith by which "the juſt do live", to ſhew itſelf in love, not only to God, and Chriſt, but to the chriſtian brotherhood, not in word only, but in true genuine deeds of unfeigned hearty affection; inſomuch, that we may aſſure ourſelves, if our faith is not accompanied with this practical love, it is nothing better than that empty dead faith, of which the apoſtle James ſays, "it profiteth not".

IT may be again worthy of conſideration, the apoſtolical writers preſent to the view of believers in Chriſt Jeſus, ſuch an idea of their relation to each other

other as muſt powerfully tend to excite and draw forth their love to one another, if their faith is of the right ſort, and in exerciſe. As the apoſtle Paul, in the 2d chap of his epiſt. to the Epheſ. repreſents the matter, we have "one Lord, one faith, one baptiſm, one God and father of all, who is above all, and thro' all, and in all" that are diſciples in truth. We have all been "called to one hope", we are "one myſtical body", and are actuated by one and the ſame ſpirit, the Spirit of Jeſus Chriſt. We are all "heirs according to the hope of eternal life, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Chriſt to the incorruptible inheritance in heaven". We expect to be aſſociated in another world, and to live there, in one grand community, united in love to one another; and eternally joining as one in "aſcribing bleſſing and honor to him that ſiteth on the throne, and to the Lamb". Can we have a realiſing faith in theſe truths of God, as we muſt have to denominate us chriſtians, and not feel in our hearts the working of affection towards each other; affection that will ſhew itſelf in all chriſtian offices of charitable kindneſs? It is impoſſible.

It may be ſaid yet farther, the goſpel-motives to chriſtian love, in practice, as well as principle, are ſuch as cannot eaſily be withſtood, where there is the exerciſe of faith in a ſuitable degree. We are called to no act of love and goodneſs to the diſciples of Chriſt, but what we ſhall be abundantly rewarded for in the coming world. A cup of cold water only given to a diſciple, in the name of a diſciple, and from love to Chriſt, and in obedience to him, ſhall in no wiſe loſe its reward. The more bountifully

bountifully we ſow, the more bountifully we ſhall reap.—What better uſe, what higher intereſt, can we put our money to, than by lending it to the Lord, for the uſe of his poor? It is the intire want of faith, or the weakneſs of it, or the not allowing it its proper exerciſe, that ſhuts our hands from the moſt liberal diſtributions to the purpoſes of chriſtian charity. Could we be wanting upon this head, if we really and fully believed, that the good God would amply repay us whatever we ſhould advance for the help of the ſaints, if not in this world, moſt aſſuredly in that which is to come?

ANOTHER moſt powerfully affecting conſideration to engage our practical love towards our brethren in Chriſt is, that he will eſteem what we do to them as if done to himſelf. For they are members of that very body of which he is the Head; they are myſtically one with him. It is in conſideration of this union, that he ſays, as in the 24th of Matthew, "inaſmuch as ye have done it to one of the leaſt of theſe my brethren ye have done it to me". Do we really believe, that, if we charitably relieve a brother in Chriſt, he will accept the kindneſs as done to himſelf? It is difficult to conceive, how we ſhould, in this caſe, refrain ourſelves herefrom. Our faith in this amazing truth muſt be weak, or rather not in preſent exerciſe, or it would open both our hearts and hands in comunications of chriſtian kindneſs.

I SHALL only ſay further, deeds of charitable goodneſs to the poor ſuffering members of

of the church of Chriſt, are mentioned by name in the account the ſcripture gives us of the proceſs of the great and general judgment; and thoſe only are pronounced "bleſſed, and bid to inherit the kingdom prepared before the foundation of the world, who have given meat to the hungry, and drink to the thirſty, cloaths to the naked, and help to the ſick, and diſtreſſed". If then we would hope to be acquitted at the bar of the future judgment, and have entrance miniſtred to us into the kingdom of Chriſt that is above, we muſt put on bowels of mercy, be kind to one another, tender-hearted, ever being in readineſs, according to our ability, to do good to "the houſhold of faith": So ſhall we, of the mercy of God, through Jeſus Chriſt, be crowned with immortality and honour in the coming world.

A M E N.